

50 FACTS ON KENYA - Did You Know... Coast Causerie, a column ...

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Coast Causerie, a column in Kenya's newspaper The Standard, holds the world record for the longest running newspaper column.

THE **STANDARD**
Kenya's leading newspaper



Official Aline House photo by Peter Souza

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To learn more about Kenya visit
www.kenya.info.

- The Coast Causerie column ran uninterrupted for 58 years, between 1943 and 2001.
- Columnist Edward Rodwell, who was still writing the column when he died at the age of 95, started the column as a "personal hobby" telling the "off-beat story of strange occasions and the people involved."

Source: Kenya Coast Week
www.coastweek.com/obit/obit-16.htm

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The New War of the Roses *Mundia Muchiri*

In Medieval England, a rose was once enough to go to war over. The so called War of the Roses lasted for thirty years; today a new type of war of the roses is beginning – this time for control of the lucrative American flower market.

Colombia has traditionally had a stranglehold on American flower buyers. Together with its smaller rival Ecuador, the two Latin American countries ship to more than 43,000 florists and vendors in the U.S. Over ninety-six percent of the imported flowers that you see in the local Seven Eleven come from Latin America. It's an import business worth \$316 million so for understandable reasons Colombia and Ecuador want to hold onto it. But a new competitor is now attempting to get in on the scene - all the way from Africa. In recent years, the East African country of Kenya has managed to develop a successful flower export business to Europe.

Grown in the cool air of the Rift Valley, Kenyan flowers are already transported every night to thousands of flower sellers in the European Union. Earlier this year the industry was badly disrupted when the Icelandic volcano was playing havoc with flights to Europe, but it has since bounced back. In fact, 35 percent of the world's flowers come from Kenya and in the UK 65 percent of the 600 tons of roses the country exports per year come from Kenya. But in America, it is a tiny 2 percent.

Competition – domestic and foreign - is the linchpin of the American economy, yet our rose imports are almost entirely controlled by Latin American flower producers. With more rose varieties, Kenya could pose a threat to the Colombian and Ecuadorean monopoly. While they are a novelty to the American consumer, this Eastern African country is ready to win over American hearts and become a key competitor to the Latin Americans.

Kenya is planning a strong presence at the International Floriculture Expo in Miami this month. The Expo is a premier conference for floriculturists in North and South America and marks a crucial first step in fostering the growth of Kenyan roses in the American market. Among the exhibitors at this year's Expo is K-Net Flowers, the largest consolidator of fresh cut flowers from Kenya. K-Net is a leader in the Kenyan industry and has been influential in expanding exports beyond Europe and gaining presence in the US, Japan and the Middle East. Thanks to vendors like K-Net Flowers, Kenyan roses are starting to make their way across the pond and on to the shelves of American supermarkets and flower shops.

In Kenya, the flower industry has become a critical facet of economic prosperity, directly and indirectly benefitting the financial stability of roughly seven percent of the Kenyan population and falling just behind tea and coffee as a leading export. The industry as a whole has withstood devastating tribulations in the recent past – having faced droughts and fallout from the volcanic ash in Europe – and has bounced back with increased vigor to expand into the U.S.

What does this mean to the American consumer? A greater presence of Kenyan imports will improve choice and variety and improve competition in a market currently held in the grips of two importers. This will undoubtedly result in better prices and more choices for wholesale importers, benefiting American consumers and in turn countless Kenyan workers and their families.

Mundia Muchiri is a freelance writer for Daily Nation and The East African as well as a Nairobi-based communications specialist.

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